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ABSTRACT

In his commencement speech at Tennessee State University, the Director of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise addressed himself to two major topics: (1) that of the need for black college graduates in private industry; and (2) that of the abolition or merging of Tennessee State University. He feels that only by black people owning their own businesses, thereby becoming producers as well as consumers, can the black people as a race have a hand in the future of the country. He emphasizes that it will be hard, but it is something that must be done. Further, the author protests the eminent danger that TSU is in as it is faced with closing its doors or merging with the other state universities in Tennessee. He praises TSU's distinguished record of providing Black students equal education and a vital link to their cultural heritage. (HS)

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OFFICE OF
MINORITY BUSINESS
ENTERPRISE

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OMBE DIRECTOR SAYS:
BLACK GRADUATES MUST EXPLORE
NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Black college graduates must explore other fertile economic areas and occupational fields where Blacks have yet to make their mark, urged John L. Jenkins, Director, Office of Minority Business Enterprise, U. S. Department of Commerce.

As the Commencement speaker at Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tenn. (Saturday, August 19), Jenkins, a native of Chattanooga and an alumnus of TSU, pointed out that, "Thanks to the outstanding contributions of Black colleges such as Tennessee State University, Blacks have made notable progress in the arts, music, athletics and medicine."

However, Jenkins added, Blacks must now begin to pursue aggressively increasing new opportunities in the private sector, as owners and operators of their own businesses.

Jenkins told the graduates, "My message to you is this -- the world is tough. It's tough for white graduates -- and even tougher for Blacks. But your chances of making it today are far greater than your parents' chances were, or even my own. I must add here, however, you must prepare yourself not only in areas of academic achievement, but in how to live, how to get along with people, how to reason and negotiate, and how to be ready when the true opportunity comes your way."

In discussing expanding new opportunities for minorities in private business ownership, Jenkins said, "When I graduated, the job that I hold today didn't exist. There was no national concerted effort to get minorities involved in the economic mainstream of this country.

"The Federal Government was not spending one hundred million dollars to provide the needed resources, technical assistance and capital for Blacks and other minorities to own and operate their own businesses."

Jenkins said it is through economic sufficiency -- Blacks owning their own enterprises and becoming producers as well as consumers -- that "we can have some say about our future development and destiny, as a people."

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The real test and strength and ultimate success of a Black college graduate, Jenkins said, "does not come from an individual profit assessment alone -- as important as this is -- but from what he or she is as a person, as a 'whole' person and to what extent he or she is able to provide leadership, at any level and in any area, toward affecting and improving the quality of life of others."

In relating to the imminent danger of Tennessee State University closing or being merged out of existence, Jenkins said, "No other publicly funded educational institution in Tennessee has the history and distinguished record of providing such equal education for Blacks in this state.

"TSU gives Black students the advantage of being involved in a life style which serves as a lighthouse for people who are proud of their heritage and who are discovering their destiny. This life style must not be sacrificed as our nation moves to eliminate racial dualism. The entire educational process benefits from this unique contribution.

"But let me remind you," Jenkins said, "that this is no brief or treatise for a return to the life of 'separate but equal'. It is an appeal for rational priorities, to make the test of a university or college whether it teaches its students or not. There is no question here as to the dedication and ability of our teachers at TSU, for they have sent many on to serve our great country in many areas of endeavor.

"It is evil to say to those of us who have our roots here at TSU that your educational heritage must be closed or merged," Jenkins said. "All that we have worked to achieve and bring honor on -- our great educational heritage -- will be lost in a fusion of such equality. We must be allowed to continue to prepare the Black student for efficient and effective participation in a white controlled society with the hope that all men will be viewed as equals."

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ADDRESS

BY

JOHN L. JENKINS

DIRECTOR

OFFICE OF MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BEFORE

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

SUMMER COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 19, 1972

6:00 P. M.

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction:

I feel honored that you would invite me to share this great occasion with you. I having graduated from here, and having talked about these types of things when I was a student here, and not very long ago I sat where you are today. To be a part of this commencement is truly an outstanding experience for me. I would like to thank Dr. Torrence, Dr. Hudson and the alumni for granting me this opportunity.

Some commencement speakers, in their rhetorical eloquence, are still telling Black college graduates that the world is in their hands, that they are the captains of their souls and the masters of their fates. May I correct that by saying, this is not true -- if it ever was -- I consider statements of that nature total hogwash. There is no need of my kidding you about the world being in your hands. I cannot even assure you that you can make the telling difference in society -- but I would encourage you to work smarter and think to try and to do so.

My message to you is clear -- the world is tough. It's tough for white graduates -- and even tougher for Blacks.

But your chances of making it today are far greater than your parents' chances were, or even my very own. I must add here, however,

you must prepare yourself not only in areas of academic achievement, but in how to live, how to negotiate, and how to be ready when the true opportunity comes your way.

When I graduated, the job that I hold today didn't exist. There was no national concentrated effort to get minorities involved in the economic mainstream of this country.

The Federal Government was not spending one hundred million dollars to provide the needed resources, technical assistance and capital for Blacks and other minorities to own and operate their own businesses.

When I graduated there was no Office of Minority Business Enterprise. There was no thought -- no conversation -- about providing equal opportunities for minority men and women to become owners and operators of their own businesses.

Thanks to the outstanding contributions of Black colleges such as Tennessee State University, Blacks have made notable progress in the arts, music, athletics, and medicine -- but there are other economic areas and occupational fields where we must begin to concern ourselves with and where Blacks are yet to make their mark. Some of these important areas are manufacturing, wholesale and large retail establishments owned by Blacks.

As we have demonstrated our competence at swinging a bat -- chasing a fly ball - dumping a ball through the hoops or at running with a pigskin with the finesse of a ballet dancer -- we must now develop skills to deal with balance sheets, profit and loss statements, cost analysis and quality control -- in preparation for developing our own enterprises and becoming producers as well as consumers.

This is what my office is all about and what we are attempting to foster for all minorities.

This is what we must come to see, so that we can have some say about our own destiny, our own future development and progress that will give us the independence that goes with owning something.

We talk about law and order, but I say to the majority sector of this country, share your great wealth, share your know-how, make available to us what we so rightly deserve -- give us something to protect, something to be proud of, in this way we can have the desire to protect, the desire to be innovative, the desire to achieve, and when all men and women have an equal opportunity in this great country of ours, we will all live in safe lawful places, for we will have then bridged the gap of human dignity and brought about opportunity for economic pride and provided incentives for taking people off welfare rolls

and placing them on payrolls. These attributes will also serve as an opportunity for welfare families not to break up but to stay together.

There's no reason to cheer about what I have said; most Americans have had these rights for centuries. But they have been denied to Blacks and other minorities, and one of the curious things is that the challenge, in even this day and time, is going to be a lot tougher than most of us realize. So I warn you, don't leave here today thinking that the world is yours, keep in mind that it's tough, it's challenging, and the road ahead must be paved by you, by your hard work and your diligence to stay on the case.

May I remind you, the same rules apply to the Black graduates who are not going into business or the professions on his own, but expects to work for an established business or institution or one of the large national companies.

Many of these jobs are what they call "high-visibility" jobs -- jobs involving a good deal of public and community contact. But again remember not to accept on the basis of your Blackness, but rather on your competence and ability.

Now that I have talked about your careers, there is more to deal with than just getting a job or owning a business. There is the matter of the

pursuit of excellence. There is a matter of your personal dignity. There is the matter of the effect and influence of your life on the lives of others.

The real true test of whether a person is well educated or not comes not from the answer to the question, "What has he come to know?" -- but rather from the answer to the question "What has he come to be?"

This comes to mind because the real test and strength and ultimate success of a Black college graduate does not come from an individual profit assessment alone -- as important as this is -- but from what he is as a person -- as a "whole" person and to what extent he or she is able to provide leadership, at any level and in any area, toward affecting and improving the quality of life of others.

Two great Americans have emphasized this point in different words. First, the very scholarly Dr. W.E.B. Dubois saw it this way:

"We are training not isolated men and women, but a living group of men and women, a group within a group. And the final product of our training must be neither a psychiatrist, nor a brick mason, nor an industrialist... but a man or a woman. To make men and to make women, we must have ideals, broad and pure, and inspired ends of living, not sordid money-getting, not apples of gold"... And in the eloquent and inspiring words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. --

"I'd like someone to mention that Martin King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I want you to be able to say that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that I did try in my life to clothe the naked. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. I want you to say he tried to help somebody."

The test and value of what the home, the University, the community and friends have given you is whether you share your great goodness with others. This is your appreciation of that support.

And in Closing:

A speech at Tennessee State University that does not relate, in part, to the imminent danger of this great University closing or being merged is not a relevant presentation at this very important stage of the University's existence.

TSU, as a Black institution, is a vital cultural link between our rich heritage of the past and our aspirations and hopes of the future.

It has been a sturdy link between the home, the community and the successful student -- a place where thousands have crossed to become physicians, lawyers, professors, great musicians, and outstanding athletes -- where many of us have come to these banks of the Cumberland River as unexplored potential with only hazy hopes and dreams, and arrived at the

enlightened shores of promise, opportunity, and achievement. This could only have been done where there is dedication among teachers and staff at this great University. This I trust TSU will never lose because it gives Black students the advantage of being involved in a life style which serves as a lighthouse for people who are proud of their heritage and who are discovering their destiny. This life style must not be sacrificed as our nation moves to eliminate racial dualism. The entire educational process benefits from this unique contribution.

But let me remind you, that this is no brief or treatise for a return to the lie of "separate but equal." It is an appeal for rational priorities, to make the test of a university or college whether it teaches its students or not. There is no question here as to the dedication and ability of our teachers, for they have sent many on to serve our great country in many areas of endeavor.

Equality is complex, and its content is not always a clear cut reality.

It is evil to say to those of us who have our roots here that your educational heritage must be closed off or merged; all that we have worked to achieve and bring honor on -- our great educational heritage -- will be lost in a fusion of such equality. We must be allowed to continue to prepare the Black student for efficient and effective participation in a white controlled society with the hope that all men will be viewed as equals.

No other publicly funded educational institution in this State has the history and distinguished record of providing such equal education for Blacks in Tennessee. Let's keep alive this great spirit, this great tradition; and in the words of Miss Laura M. Averitte, the athoress of the great school's alma mater:

"Send forth sons both strong and valiant;
Send forth daughters wise and true;
Filled with hope and dauntless courage --
Motives sane and true.
Alma Mater, kindly mothers,
Smile on Tennessee.
May she lift her head toward heaven --
Honor, country, God and thee."

As we leave this place, and go forth to be about the business for which we have been prepared, allow all the opportunity to hold our head high and be proud that we are free, gifted and Black.

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